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RACE TO THE TOP PRESENTATION
PAUL REVILLE, SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
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I want to echo the Governor's gratitude to you for recognizing the potential in our application and selecting Massachusetts as a finalist in this competition. We are deeply appreciative of this opportunity to describe how we will use support from the Race to the Top Fund to take our public schools to new heights while simultaneously closing persistent achievement gaps.

The history of school reform over the last two decades shows that Massachusetts is uniquely positioned to deliver on the promises of our application.

In the 1990s, I led the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education in shaping the first chapter of education reform and served on the state Board of Education to implement these initial game-changing reforms. We came together as a Commonwealth across the education, business and community sectors because we recognized that students arriving in the workplace with high school diplomas lacked the knowledge and skills they needed to build successful lives outside of high school. We were doing a great disservice to these students by allowing them to graduate without properly preparing them for the rigor of college and careers. We responded

by working with our legislature to pass the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, which expanded state support for public education in exchange for rigorous standards and accountability. Through those efforts, Massachusetts has vaulted from the middle of the pack among the states in educational achievement, to the top tier of high achievers, both nationally and internationally.

Now, 20 years later, I'm back as Secretary of Education and a member of the Board of Education as we again face a challenge of similar magnitude. Despite our progress, we have not been successful in dramatically reducing achievement gaps between White and Asian students and their African-American, Latino, low-income, disabled and English language learning peers. Closing these gaps once and for all is a moral imperative and we stand ready to do it now.

We believed in 1993 and we believe now that high expectations and high achievement must be the norm for all students and "all means all." The Governor powerfully and correctly reminds us that notwithstanding our world class educational performance over the past decade and a half, "doing well is not good enough." This means that we need to unflinchingly look at the data, learn the lessons, and formulate a set of courageous new strategies to guarantee that we realize our original goal: all students at proficiency, all students prepared for success.

The data tell us, for example, that despite our gains overall, our high averages, too many of our students are still trapped in underperforming schools that limit their life chances and consign them to bleak futures. It is obvious that, both locally and nationally, we need to dramatically improve our strategies for turning around our lowest-performing schools. We need to rescue these children. And, therefore, this is one of the central themes of our education action plan and Race to the Top proposal.

Just as we need to scale up our successful strategies, we need to learn the lessons of where we have fallen short. In hindsight, we see that we underestimated the support, the additional expertise, the professional development that teachers need to educate not just some, but all, each and every one of our students, to the kind of high standard that had heretofore been reserved for an elite few.

We also know that we need to do a better job of building strong leaders at both the school and district levels – instructional leaders who know what it

takes to inspire and support their staff members, build positive cultures, and effectively manage their organizations. This new policy goal fundamentally altered the work of educational leaders and teachers, and they needed a Marshall Plan's worth of support to achieve this unprecedented objective. We did not supply enough curricular and instructional support. Our Race to the Top strategies will provide that support.

Likewise, looking at the still close correlation between socio-economic status and educational achievement and attainment, we can see that we underestimated the impact of poverty and social capital on students' educational outcomes. Similarly, we underestimated the support that school districts and school leaders need from the state in transforming low-performing schools in a way that lasts. In short, we've learned valuable lessons about the limitations of the first generation of education reform in Massachusetts and these lessons now chart the path for where we must go in our second stage of reform.

I'm being direct with you about our shortcomings because I want to make it clear that Massachusetts is not complacent about our successes. The first generation of education reform in Massachusetts took us a long way, but not far enough. We can do better. We will do better.

We've already taken major steps down that road. In January, Governor Patrick and our legislature approved a sweeping new education law aimed at closing achievement gaps in Massachusetts. The new law is the blueprint for our next generation of reforms and will facilitate the achievement of many components of our Race to the Top plan.

The Achievement Gap law lifts charter school caps to expand charter schools in our lowest-performing districts, using only proven providers who will focus on the students with the greatest achievement gaps. The new law provides new rules, tools and supports for superintendents and the state to intervene in our lowest-performing schools by crafting powerful turnaround plans that focus on the needs of students and families and cast away rules and policies that inhibit progress. It also creates a new type of public school – Innovation Schools – that allows school districts to replicate the best features of charter schools within the traditional district structure.

This major school reform legislation was constructed with the input of classroom teachers, school and district administrators, community partners

and business leaders. But because it challenged some entrenched interests and practices, its passage was not easy. In the end, however, our legislature and nearly every quarter of our educational community supported it, because when it comes to bold action on education, Massachusetts has always chosen to move forward.

The new law illustrates our tradition of working with our education sector to construct reform in a collaborative way while also pushing the envelope to promote innovation. Our Race to the Top application reflects an unswerving commitment to the highest standards, a set of challenging strategies and, simultaneously, a commitment to partnership in implementation. We seek to do reform with the field, not to the field. Always willing to stand on principle as we have done with our MCAS and graduation standards, we try to avoid top down, prescriptive mandates in favor of a policy and practice development process that honors professional expertise and local context. Promoting collaboration while also demanding results and embracing innovation - this is the guiding philosophy of our Race to the Top application.

As I stated earlier, our paramount goal is to close the achievement gaps in Massachusetts, once and for all. In doing so, we will vault Massachusetts from its status as the leader in educational achievement among the states to the leader in educational achievement in the world.

Commissioner Chester and his team will further explain the details of our Race to the Top plan. Superintendent Johnson is here to provide insight on what the plan means from a local perspective.

I want to leave you with one key point: Over the last 17 years, we have learned what works; we know what more we need to do; and we're ready and able to do it.

In my role as Secretary of Education, I pledge to make this work my top priority. I will enlist our Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Higher Education and the University of Massachusetts in this work. They have much to contribute with their expertise, resources, programs, and coordination. Similarly, I will continue to work closely with my Cabinet colleagues, especially those on the Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet, to further support our efforts to address the non-academic needs of our students. Our executive offices of Health and Human Services and Labor and Workforce Development have already eagerly begun partnering

on this work. I will continue to work with our colleagues in the Legislature to ensure their continued understanding and support for this work. Finally, the Governor and I will continue to reach out to all our constituency groups to challenge them to join with us in making the tough decisions necessary to move full speed ahead in executing this major assault on achievement gaps.

Whether we are selected for a Phase I grant or not, Massachusetts is committed to undertaking the work outlined on our plan – but we hope to prove ourselves worthy of your support.

We have recruited 257 districts, representing 86% of our low-income students, as our partners in this work. We just successfully mounted the most significant legislative effort since the Education Reform Act of 1993 in order to lay the groundwork for our full-scale offensive to eradicate achievement gaps. Our entire state government and educational community has coalesced in support of this mounting campaign.

Massachusetts is ready and eager to lead the next stage of national school reform by implementing the potent array of strategies we have designed to boost student learning and close pernicious achievement gaps in our Commonwealth. My experience with school reform in Massachusetts tells me that now is the time; our assets are well aligned, we have the leaders, the strategy and the urgency to take a major step forward. We need your help to make this big stride.

We appreciate your consideration of our application, and we look forward to the rest of our discussion.

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